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Sri Lanka should be judged in proportion to the challenges faced by a country emerging from a 30 year terrorist conflict
- Ambassador Aryasinha tells the Human Rights Committee in Geneva

Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva and Leader of the Sri Lanka delegation to the Human Rights Committee Ambassador Ravinatha Aryasinha asked the Human Rights Committee to "judge Sri Lanka in proportion to the challenges Sri Lanka has continued to face as a country emerging from a 30 year terrorist conflict".

The Ambassador made this observation in responding to comments made during the consideration of Sri Lanka's 5th Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by the Human Rights Committee, which was held on 7-8 October 2014 in Geneva. The Human Rights Committee comprises a body of independent experts from 18 countries that monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by its State parties.

Responding to a question raised by the Committee as to why the PTA is still in existence in Sri Lanka, Ambassador Aryasinha said Sri Lanka does not shy away from making considered choices and is adept at differentiating, in the best interest of its people. He recalled that notwithstanding security concerns, the government had speedily resettled almost all internally displaced persons, that out of approximately 12,000 LTTE ex-combatants who have been reintegrated into society, all but 114 are undergoing rehabilitation, and 84 are under legal proceedings, and that in 2011 the government had allowed emergency to lapse, which at the time many felt was too hasty. In spite of concerns raised, the Government of Sri Lanka had taken these calculated risks. He said, the government had to keep the PTA in effect, albeit reluctantly, due to recent incidents pointing to attempts at the resurgence of terrorism in Sri Lanka with involvement of external networks. He pointed out that such caution was also taken by many governments who have had to face the threat of terrorism.

In his opening statement, the Ambassador welcomed the opportunity to interact with the Human Rights Committee, and through it to continue the constructive engagement Sri Lanka has maintained with the processes of the UN human rights mechanisms.

Tracing the dramatic transformation that had taken place in Sri Lanka since the country last presented its report to the Human Rights Committee in 2003, the Ambassador also referred to an observation made by the Committee's Chair Sir Nigel Rodley, at the opening of the current session of the Human Rights Committee, that "what was happening in Syria and Iraq with respect to a group that was pursuing policies that

were simply the antithesis of universal values and human rights standards," and a "brazen challenge to the international community". He reminded the Committee that Sri Lanka also overcame a similar brazen challenge, when in 2009 it defeated the ruthless terror of the LTTE, a group that also claimed a mono-ethnic state glorifying murder. He said that "it is fortunate that on what is happening today, the international community is taking note, coming together to meet the threat and is exercising remedies for it. He recalled that "however for us in Sri Lanka, while terrorism began in the early 1980s, it was not until 1991 when Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India was killed that the world started recognising the ruthlessness of the LTTE. It was not until 1996 when the US banned the LTTE that the Western world recognised our problem. And it was only after 2001 following 9/11 that actually this question got any real attention".

Ambassador Aryasinha said Sri Lanka views the promotion and protection of human rights not as an end in itself but as an indispensable component of peace building and reconciliation following a three decade long conflict against separatist terrorism. In a country where no one was spared the horrors of terrorism, the government of Sri Lanka has succeeded in restoring to the entirety of Sri Lanka's population the most important right - the right to life. He said the Committee should look at the ensuing developments relating to civil and political rights in Sri Lanka in this context. The Government has taken measures to ensure sustainable peace and reconciliation and rapid development in the country, as it is an important step to ensure the full enjoyment of civil and political rights by all.

The Government delegation led by Ambassador Aryasinha, comprised Mr. S.B Divaratne, Advisor to the President and Secretary, Special Bureau of Reconciliation, Mr. Janaka Sugathadasa, Secretary, Ministry of Resettlement, Mr. Eric Illayapparachchi, Secretary, Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs, Mr. Nimal Kotawalagedara, Addl. Secretary, Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms, Mr. K.D.S. Ruwanchandra, Addl. Secretary, Ministry of Law and Order, Mrs. Bimba Jayasinghe Tillekeratne, PC, Senior Additional Solicitor General, Mrs. Samantha Jayasuriya, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka in Geneva, Ms. Sashikala Premawardhane, Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Defence, Mr. Nerin Palle, Deputy Solicitor General, Attorney General's Department, Mr. Sugeeshwara Gunaratna, Director, Ministry of External Affairs, Ms. Priyanga Wickramasinghe, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka in Geneva, Mr. Rajiv Goonetilleke, Senior State Counsel and Ms. Dilini Gunasekera, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka in Geneva.

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